

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Boucher Hails Transportation Action



State Reps. Toni Boucher R-143, Wilton, Norwalk, today said Fairfield County at last is receiving long overdue attention for its transportation problems that are holding back the economic growth of the entire state.

The state legislature returned in special session to approve a \$1.3 billion transportation package that authorizes the state Department of Transportation to replace the 342 Metro-North commuter rail cars, build a new maintenance facility, buy more buses and ease I-95 bottlenecks. By 2008, Rep. Boucher said, new rail cars are expected to be delivered for a clean, modern, reliable rail alternative to clogged highways.

Rep. Boucher said, “Thousands of frustrated rail and highway commuters will be very disappointed if nothing is done. Commuters, employers and the media have pleaded to make improvements to the state's transportation system the No. 1 priority. I have made the case over and over in the Transportation committee and Appropriations committee.

Rep. Boucher added, “Just this week, I have received more feedback from our daily train riders. They remark that the trains are packed full, in disrepair and need cleaning not to mention the need for relief due to malfunctioning air-conditioning systems. Let get those tax dollars in our state inside of incentivizing our tax base to move to New Jersey or New York where the trains, tracks and schedule are superior.”

Rep. Boucher said, “We also need to upgrade the Danbury train line – an underdeveloped economic resource for our state. It could become an engine for growth and prosperity if properly planned and upgraded. Think of what that could mean for housing or business development. The newly approved Town Center of Redding is banking on this train line’s improvement.”

The issue of replacing and increasing the number of rail cars dates back at least to the year 2000. That year, the legislature authorized the use of \$35 million in state surplus funds to purchase eight new commuter rail cars. Legislation also was adopted requiring the state to reexamine its contract with Metro-North to see that the state and commuters are receiving the best value for our dollars.

In 2001, the state House and Senate adopted legislation that provided an added \$50 million to address transportation. It began a process of rail, bus, carpool and vanpool improvements, and it created a Transportation Strategy Board to devise a long-term statewide plan.

Then in 2003, legislation was adopted to implement a 10-year, \$264-million Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board plan addressing traffic congestion, including more Metro-North rail cars for 2,000 more riders, improved stations, expanded parking, reducing truck traffic on I-95 and increasing use of waterways.

The current legislation goes beyond the interim strategy to refurbish used rail cars for the commuter branch lines and free up more cars for the New Haven main line. Now, officials agree the entire 30-year-old fleet is beyond its useful life and must go.

The latest New Haven Rail revitalization program will require the state to borrow \$485.6 million to generate federal matching funds, as well as New York state's proportional contribution to the new rail cars. Another \$344.5 million in bonding will go for other statewide strategic improvements.

To help pay for the new plan, there will be an increased petroleum excise tax on the wholesale price of fuel throughout the state, and a planned \$1 per ticket surcharge on rail riders starting in 2008.

Rep. Boucher said, "One shortcoming is that the goal of shifting cargo from trucks to barges is still far from becoming a reality.

Rep. Boucher said, "Despite the delays and disappointments, transportation is one area of state government where Fairfield County is about to see a real return for its tax dollars. Most other state expenditures are heavily skewed to the state's three big cities, Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven. Today is Fairfield County's day."